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Daniel Overview (Part 1)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview of the book of Daniel, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of its fulfilled prophecies which suggest divine inspiration. He explains that the book follows the story of Daniel and his friends who remain faithful to their beliefs despite being taken captive in Babylon. The book contains historical narratives of Babylonian rulers and prophetic visions, including prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and a time of trouble and tribulation. Gregg highlights the ongoing relevance and significance of the prophecies in the book of Daniel for believers today.

Transcript

So we're going to be looking at the book of Daniel. First of all, an introduction to the book of Daniel. And I want to say that Daniel is one of the most important books of the Old Testament, not because of the things it tells us prophetically.

Now a lot of people think that's what makes it important. They say, oh, it's telling us about the Antichrist, about the end of the world, and things like that. Actually, in my opinion, Daniel doesn't talk about those things.

I believe the prophecies of Daniel go as far into his future as to include the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Those passages are usually thought to be out of future Antichrist and so forth. I'll give my reasons.

I see them differently. So I don't look at Daniel as a guide to the end of the world like many people do. And you may know I don't look at the book of Revelation that way either, but many people do.

The thing that makes Daniel so important is that his prophecies, the ones that have already come true, the ones that came true a long time ago, were predicted with such accuracy and detail beforehand that there's no way to explain the phenomenon of this accuracy of prediction and the way that it's going to happen. The Bible is a book of prophecy. It's a book of prophecy.

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It's a book of prophecy. It's a book of prophecy. It's a astonishing fulfillment of prophecies.

Isaiah for example predicts what Cyrus would do and calls him by name 200 years before he does it, and 150 years before he's born. I mean obviously, what do you do with that? Well, what a skeptic does, and what they do with Daniel also is say, well there's no way that a man writing in the time of Isaiah or writing in the time of Daniel could have known the details of these later events so obviously they didn't write them. They must have been written by someone later, pretending to be writing earlier.

Now, there's not any good reasons for believing this, but if you talk to skeptics who have studied Daniel, they will give some reasons. We're going to talk about those reasons. They would say Daniel was not really written by a man named Daniel 600 years before Christ.

It prophesies in detail that it's unmistakable. Events that go at least as late in history as 164 BC with Antiochus Epiphanes. I'd say they go further forward than that because it talks about the Messiah and when he came.

The 70 weeks of Daniel are about when the Messiah would show up, and he showed up on schedule in history. Now, the critics, therefore, who have never really believed in the inspiration of Scripture, but still have to say something about these phenomena, they late-date the book of Daniel, just like they do late-date Isaiah and any other book of the Bible that has remarkable instances of fulfilled prophecy. Now, I would point out to you that in Isaiah chapter, I think it's in chapter 41, God said that his ability to predict the future is the proof that he is God because it is a subtext of that.

No one knows the future except God. In Isaiah 41, God challenges the pagan gods and says, tell us what the future holds if you're gods. They will know you're gods.

And he does not demur from doing that himself a great deal. There's hundreds of prophecies, of course, in the Bible. Not all of them is stupendous and remarkable in their fulfillment as some others.

But Daniel probably leads the books of the Bible in terms of having the most inexplicable prophecies that have been fulfilled, and have been fulfilled incontrovertibly. There are always, in some prophecies, vagueness that renders it possible for people to say, ah, that might not have really been predicted in that event. It's like reading Nostradamus.

If you ever read Nostradamus's things, no one understands what he says. They're all mystical. They're all mysterious.

And the scholars of Nostradamus find three or four or ten different possible meanings to everything he says. Daniel doesn't really give that much flexibility. He's too detailed.

And timeframes and so forth are mentioned. And for that reason, Daniel is the greatest threat, probably, in the Old Testament to the unbelievers' determination to remain an unbeliever. I mean, a person could be a Jew and not a Christian and believe that Daniel was inspired, but a person could not be an atheist and believe that Daniel was inspired because there's no one to inspire if there's no God.

And yet, if there's no inspiration, there's no explanation of many of the phenomena we encounter in the book. And that's what we're going to be seeing. Now, Daniel's historical setting was he was born in the early stage of Josiah's reign.

Now, if you remember Judah's history, this is after the northern kingdom of Israel was gone. They'd been carried off in 722 B.C. by Assyria. And then the southern kingdom of Judah lasted until 586, so considerably longer, partly because they had at least one good king, Hezekiah, who sought God for protection at the time that the Assyrians, who had destroyed the northern kingdom, came to do the same to the southern kingdom.

But they did so at a bad time for them, that is for the Assyrians, because that's one of the very few times Judah had a good king who sought God. And Hezekiah prayed, and God sent an angel and slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers outside the gates and spared the city. So Judah lasted longer than Israel, the northern kingdom, did.

But they didn't have very many good kings. After Hezekiah, the next king was Manasseh, the very worst king Israel ever had, and the longest reigning, and introduced the most corruption. So even though Hezekiah was good, all his games were wasted and lost with his son Manasseh.

Shortly after that, Josiah came along, and he was at age eight, became king. And when he got older and was reigning more responsibly as an adult, he discovered that the law of Moses had been totally neglected by the nation. In fact, they didn't even know what it was.

A priest found a copy of it in the temple and didn't know what it was. Generations had ignored it. And when Josiah heard it read, he realized that they, as a nation, had violated everything God told them to do.

He tore his garments as a typical Middle Eastern means of showing grief and repentance, and he said, we need to make some changes. So Josiah started making reforms according to the law right around the time Daniel was born. So Daniel was born at one of the few good periods, spiritually speaking, of Jerusalem's history.

And yet he was not very old before he was carried away into captivity, because we don't know Daniel's age at the time, but he's called a youth in all likelihood he was in his teens, when he was carried off by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon. Now, this was not the final siege of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Judea three times.

Each time he carried off some captives, and Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went off in the first lot. It was 597 BC, just a few years later, that Nebuchadnezzar came back and took some more captives. At that time, Ezekiel was one of those who was taken from Jerusalem and taken into Babylon.

So Daniel was there before Ezekiel. And then finally, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar came back and destroyed the whole city, burned down the temple, took the rest of the Jews into captivity. So the captivity began in three, took place in three waves.

But Daniel was in Jerusalem probably the first, who knows, 15 years of his life maybe. And he would have had occasion to be affected by Josiah's reforms. He would have also heard Jeremiah preach in the city, because Jeremiah was preaching at that time in that same location.

Later on in Daniel 9, we find that Daniel's reading the book of Jeremiah. So he was certainly familiar with Jeremiah, at least the book, and almost certainly would have had occasion to hear the man preach himself. He may also have known Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was still a priest in the city at the time Daniel was carried away. But if Daniel had never had a chance to meet Ezekiel, Ezekiel at least knew who Daniel was, because Ezekiel, once he was carried away into Babylon, made reference to Daniel in his book a few times as a notable, righteous man. So it didn't take Daniel long to get a reputation of being a godly and wise man in Babylon.

What happened was he, as I say, was carried away in 605 BC, and he was probably of noble blood, because the ones that were taken away in that first wave were sort of the cream of the crop. What Nebuchadnezzar wanted to do was take the best of the youth of his conquered people, take them back to Babylon, train them in the Chaldean language, the Babylonian language, and then recruit them into offices to be counselors and things like that at the king. Daniel and his friends were taken and trained, and they were the

smartest of the bunch and very righteous.

We find in chapter one that when they got to Babylon, because they were, although they were captives, they were selected to be trained to serve the king and so forth, they were treated well and they were fed well. But Daniel and his friends decided they wouldn't eat the food that the king was serving, and it's not to be ordinary, but because the Babylonians didn't keep a kosher diet, and Daniel and his friends were Jews, devout Jews. And the only way to avoid eating unkosher meat was to eat no meat at all.

And so he requested that he and his friends could only eat vegetables, have a vegetarian diet, because under the Jewish law there were no plant foods that were unclean, only certain animals were unclean. But the man who was the keeper and the trainer and the caregiver of these captives, he said, well, I'm afraid to give you that kind of diet because, well, I mean, you might not be healthy. You might be lean and gaunt, and if the king comes and checks you out and sees that you're not in good condition, that would be my head.

And Daniel said, well, just give us a test for 10 days. Let us eat only vegetables for 10 days, and, you know, if we don't look healthy, you can put us on your regular diet. And 10 days later we find that Daniel and his friends were healthier and brighter and so forth than everybody else, so they were able apparently to stay on that restricted diet according to their convictions.

But Daniel became well known to the king of Babylon in Chapter 2 when Nebuchadnezzar had a dream from which he awakened very disturbed. He apparently knew it was significant. When I wake up, sometimes I remember what I dreamed, sometimes I don't.

But I don't usually wake up very disturbed by my dreams, even if they're bad dreams. I'm more relieved to be awake. But once in a while I've had a dream which I really felt God was trying to get to me about something, not very often.

And they were dreams I remember. I woke up very disturbed and very unsettled, even in a sweat from them, because I felt like this is something that God's trying to get across to me. And Pharaoh had the same experience when Joseph was in Egypt, remember, had the dream about the fat cows and the lean cows and so forth.

And he woke up disturbed from the dream, and his wise men were required to interpret the dream for him, and Joseph was the one who was able to do it. Nebuchadnezzar woke up from such a dream, and he called for his wise men, and Daniel was still in training, so he wasn't called in. He and his friends were not brought in, but the seasoned Chaldeans and astrologers and so forth were brought in.

And Nebuchadnezzar didn't just want them to interpret the dream, he wanted them to

tell him what the dream was. And they said, no one can do that. No one can tell you what the dream is.

You tell us the dream, we'll tell you what it means. And Nebuchadnezzar said, you guys are sly. If I tell you the dream, you can tell me any kind of interpretation you want to.

I want to, if you know something that's supernaturally known, you tell me what the dream is first, and then the interpretation. And they said, the king is asking for something no one has ever asked any wise men to do. We can't do that, no one can do that.

Only the gods in heaven can do that. And so Nebuchadnezzar was so disappointed with them, he just ordered them all to be put to death. Now that death sentence would have affected Daniel and his friends too, who were being trained for the same office.

And when the executioners came, or at least the officers came to announce to Daniel, his friends said, you're going to die because of this decree. Daniel said, well, wait, we didn't get a chance here. Tell Nebuchadnezzar, we'll give him the answer to his dream.

And so they allowed it. And Daniel didn't know what the dream was either. So he went, he and his friends prayed and prayed and prayed.

And they got the revelation. They got, he found out what the dream was from God and he found out what the meaning was. He came and gave the interpretation and this impressed Nebuchadnezzar to no end.

And he definitely elevated Daniel and his friends. He praised the God of Daniel, even though Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan guy. Daniel had a tremendous impact on Nebuchadnezzar.

Not enough, because in the next chapter, Nebuchadnezzar built a big image of himself, apparently. We don't know if it was of himself, probably was. Big gold image.

And he regarded everyone in Babylon to bow down to it. Whenever the music played, they're going to have, they have all the musicians gather. As soon as these people start playing, everyone got on your face before this image.

And when, when the music played, everyone did go down on their face, except there were three guys still standing up and a Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And they were hauled before the king. And he said, why didn't you do this? He said, we're not going to bow down to your image.

We don't do that. We're Jews. We don't bow down to images.

And he said, I'll give you one more chance. If you don't, if you don't do it, I'm going to throw you into the fiery furnace. And they said, you can do whatever you want to.

We're not going to bow down. They said, if our God is able to deliver us from your fiery furnace, if he wants to. But if he doesn't, we're still not going to bow down.

And so Nebuchadnezzar was in a fury. He threw them in the furnace. As you all know, the story from Sunday school.

The fire was so hot that just getting close enough to the furnace to throw these guys inbound, he killed the guards, the policemen who threw them in there. And, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego survived it without a problem. And again, Nebuchadnezzar said, well, the God of the Hebrews, he's the real God.

But he didn't really, he's one of those guys who, you know, kind of goes up at every altar call, but never changes. In chapter four, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream himself. It was a dream of a tree that was large and spreading and prosperous and healthy.

And then it was cut down and it became a stump. And an announcer from heaven said, let seven times pass over him in this condition. Again, Daniel was brought in to interpret it.

And Daniel said, OK, you're the tree, Nebuchadnezzar. God has given you a kingdom. You're flourishing.

You're doing great. But because of your pride, you're going to be cut down and you're going to eat grass like an ox for seven times. Usually it's understood to mean seven years.

And the hair of your head will grow out like the feathers of an eagle and your fingernails will grow out like the claws of an eagle. And you'll eat grass like an ox until you know that the heavens reign and that he gives and that God gives the kingdoms to whoever he wills. Well, sure enough, Nebuchadnezzar out looking over his kingdom and congratulating himself, saying, have not I, Nebuchadnezzar, done all these great things? And a voice from heaven said, it's your time, Neb.

And so he went mad and he went out and apparently for seven years was out in the out under the sky eating grass like an ox. By the way, this particular mental illness is not unknown where people actually have believed they were cows. It's not very common, but there's actually a clinical name for that.

I forget what it is. Has something to do with the word bovine, I believe, but it's a therapeutic name for a certain kind of mental illness. Anyway, at the end of seven years, his senses came back to him.

He praised God again. And that's the last time we hear about Nebuchadnezzar. He last thing he's praising God at the end of his of the record.

But he'd done that before, too, and he didn't stick with it. So we don't know whether we'll see him in heaven or not. I'd like to think so.

Chapter five. We have Belshazzar, the last king in Babylon, having a great feast. And he takes the

Cups and the bowls and the things that have been stolen by his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar, from the Jewish temple. And he brings them out and he fills them with wine and he and his generals toast the gods of wood and stone and the and the gods of the pagans. And God, the real God, is quite offended by this, obviously.

And so what happens is God's hand or a man's hand appears and etches some words in the plaster of the wall with its finger. And everyone's stunned. Everyone's shocked.

In fact, it says of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar says his knees smote one against the other. And the joints of his loins were loosed, which some people think means he crapped himself. But that's really what this thought, the expression is thought to mean.

And so he's really terrified. He calls for somebody to come in and read the writing again. His wise men are totally impotent.

They can't do it. And so Daniel is brought in and Daniel reads it. And it's just a few words and they are Hebrew words and they they mean weighed, weighed, wanting.

I'm sorry. There's another word in there, too. But but putting them together, Daniel says, you have been weighed in the balances and and been found wanting.

And he says tonight your kingdom is going to be taken from you. The Medes and the Persians are going to take it. Well, that night, the Medes and the Persians did.

Cyrus, the king of the Persians, conquered Babylon that night. Belshazzar was killed and so were his generals. And it was almost like there was no war.

There's no resistance. All the military leaders were drunk at this party. And what had actually happened, as some of you may know, is that Babylon was surrounded by walls that were impenetrable and unscalable.

They were, according to Herodotus, the historian writing about four centuries before Christ, the Greek historian. He said the walls of Babylon were like 300 feet tall and so thick you could drive eight chariots side by side on the top of the wall. It's like an eight lane highway.

That's a big wall. Quite an engineering feat for that time. 300 feet tall, that's a 30 story building all around the city.

Impregnable, except there was one weak link. And that was that the Euphrates River ran

through the city, which means it entered the city under the wall at one point and left the city at another point under the wall. In order to, you know, avoid vulnerability, the Babylonians had built heavy iron gates, brass gates, bronze gates, and they put them in the riverbed.

Well, it's interesting that Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter 45, predicts to Cyrus, again before he was born, that he would conquer Babylon. He would release the Jews from captivity and it says the gates will not be shut. And that's what Cyrus found.

Actually, they rerouted the river Euphrates so that the water went another way. The riverbed under the wall dried up. The gates were open.

They found them open and they marched in while Belshazzar's generals were drunk and partying and they just took the city without a fight. They did execute the leadership, but there was no war. And that's how Babylon fell.

Now, secular history will tell you the same thing, but that's how Babylon fell. But there's some interesting details that Daniel gives that secular historians didn't know until the early 20th century when the Nabonidus chronicles were discovered. Quite a few cuneiform tablets and so forth from the period were discovered by archaeologists around, I think it was in the 1920s.

And that really shed a lot of light on some of the details about the fall of Babylon that were not otherwise known, but that were recorded in Daniel, which I'll say more about later. When you come to chapter 6, then, chapter 6 is Daniel and the lion's den. And the new king, the Persian king, because the Medes and the Persians have conquered Babylon.

It's a guy named Darius or Darius the Mede. There is controversy as to who he was. We'll have more to say about that in the course of this evening.

But Darius the Mede is the Persian king at the time, and he likes Daniel. Daniel's really shown himself to be brilliant and able to solve problems that nobody else can solve. And so he's given a position above all the other leadership under the king and the other leaders under the king who are all Persian Babylonian pagans.

They're jealous of this Jew who's so prosperous and who's so respected. So they figured, how are we going to get rid of this guy? They couldn't find any dirt on him. And so they said, well, I know how we can do it.

We can get a law signed without him knowing it, that no one can pray to anyone but Darius for the next 30 days. And whoever prays to any other god during that time will be thrown to the den of lions. And Darius didn't think of the ramifications as having Daniel.

These guys flattered Darius and said, oh, you should really solidify your base here and

have a 30-day period where everyone has to pray to you and no one else. He signed it. And then Daniel was arrested because he didn't stop praying to Yahweh.

And when Darius realized he'd been tricked, he was very upset, but he couldn't change it. And there's another interesting thing about Daniel. We know historically that the laws of the Medes and Persians, once they've been exacted by the monarch, could not be changed even by the monarch.

And it's interesting because Nebuchadnezzar was able to change his laws because he was a Babylonian. And it's known historically that Babylonian emperor had the right to make laws or revoke the laws any time he wanted to, but the Persians had a different policy. And we see that reflected in these stories of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel and of Darius the Persian.

Anyway, Daniel has to go in the lion's den. God preserves him. He's still alive the next day.

He's lifted out and he's safe. And all the guys who conspired against Daniel are thrown into the lion's den, and the lions consume them. And that's how that story goes.

Then, of course, Darius does the same kind of thing that Nebuchadnezzar did, praises the god of Daniel that he can do what no one else can do and so forth. Now, that's the first six chapters, and that's the first half of the book. There's 12 chapters in Daniel, and those are the historical portion.

That is, that's the portion that tells stories. It's narrative, stories about Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, about Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and so forth, and the lions. But when you get to chapter 7 through 12, the other half of the book, there aren't really stories anymore.

There's prophetic visions. Now, we already had one of those in chapter 2. At least Nebuchadnezzar's dream would be in that category, but it was in the setting of a narrative. In chapter 7 through 12, it's all dreams and visions of Daniel.

In chapter 7, Daniel has a dream. In that dream, there's four beasts that come out of the sea. The first is like a lion, roughly.

It has wings and things like that, so it's not very much like the lions we see at the zoo, but it's compared to a lion. The second one is like a bear. The third one is like a leopard.

It has, like, four wings. And then the fourth beast is not compared to any earthly beast at all, but it's said to have 10 horns. And as the prophecy goes on, among the 10 horns, apparently an 11th horn comes up and becomes prominent.

And once the fourth beast is dead, the 11th horn that came out of his head becomes a

king of its own. And it becomes a persecutor of the saints and a very evil, vile ruler. Now, as the chapter goes on, there is some interpretation given of the dream.

It turns out that the four beasts that come out of the sea represent the same things that were four metals in an image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. We'll come back to these and we'll talk about identifying them. But after talking about these four kingdoms, there is a prophecy about the Messiah. It's the only place, in fact, in the Old Testament that uses the term the Son of Man to speak of the Messiah.

And that's in Daniel 7, 13 or 14, somewhere about there. And he sees the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven to heaven and sitting down at the right hand of the Ancient of Days, who is a term for God. And then the kingdom is given to the people of God.

And we'll have something to say about what that refers to also. But that's what that chapter 7 is about. You've got these four empires followed by the kingdom of God and the enthronement of Christ and the giving of the kingdom to his people.

That's chapter 7. Chapter 8 is another dream that Daniel had. This one is primarily about a ram that had two horns and a goat, a he-goat, that had one notable horn, like a unicorn, I guess. And in this dream, the ram was fat and sassy, but he and the goat get angry at each other.

And so these two animals are coming together head to head. And the goat with the notable horn destroys the ram and replaces him. And then that horn is broken on the goat and four other horns come up from it.

And one of those horns that comes up from it begins to be a ruler who does awful things to the people of God. And it's called the little horn. Now, in chapter 7, there was a little horn that came up out of the fourth beast, and it's called a little horn.

In chapter 8, there's a little horn that comes up out of the goat that has destroyed the ram, which is also called the little horn. Both are bad guys, but they're not the same bad guys. We'll come back to all of this.

I'm just surveying the book right now. I don't know what's in each chapter. We'll talk about the meaning of these things when we come back to them.

Chapter 9, then, is the prophecy of the 70 weeks. The chapter begins with Daniel reading the book of Jeremiah. He's reading Jeremiah 29, where Jeremiah talks about the Babylonian exile will last 70 years.

And Daniel realizes, hey, it's been almost 70 years. It's about time for God to end this exile. So he sets himself to fast and to pray.

An angel appears to him and tells him, well, actually, there's going to be not 70 more years, but 70 times 7 more years. Kind of reminds you of when Peter said to Jesus, how many times shall I forgive my brother? Seven times? He says, no, not seven. 70 times 7. It's kind of like that.

It's been 70 years. All good. The troubles are over for Israel.

We're going to go back to Israel. And God says, well, yeah, but there's going to be another 70 times 7. 490 years from the decree that allows you to go back and rebuild Jerusalem, which will be a decree made by one of the Persian rulers. From that point to Messiah will be 69 of these 7, which is 483 years.

And then there's going to be a last 7, a last week. In Daniel 9, in our traditional translation, it says 70 weeks. There's going to be 7 weeks and 62 weeks and one more week and so forth.

So we call these the 70 weeks of Daniel. The word week should not be confused for 7 days, though. In the passage, it means a period of 7 years is a week.

So 70 of them is 70 times 7 years. And that's 490. And it tells us exactly when the Messiah is coming.

The first time. The first coming of the Messiah. Now, this, of course, is a very important prophecy because the Jews today are still thinking the Messiah hasn't come yet.

And yet the prophecy said within 490 years of the decree that releases the Jews from their Babylonian exile so they can go back and build the temple, which they did in 538 B.C. You're going to have the Messiah, the prince coming. So obviously, there's not going to be any more Messiah's coming after that period of time. Unless the same one comes back, which is what we expect.

But it certainly focuses on a narrow window of time when the Messiah, the true Messiah, could possibly be. And we'll talk about that prophecy more later, too. When you come to Chapter 10, it's one final vision that goes all the way through Chapter 12.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 is a continuous vision. Chapter 10 begins with Daniel praying and fasting, seeking some guidance from God. We don't know what he's seeking guidance about.

He's just praying and fasting. And after 21 days of that, an angel of some sort appears to him and says, I almost didn't get here. He says, God sent me 21 days ago.

When you first started praying, I left to bring you this message. But the principality of Persia, which is a demonic power in the heavenlies, he withstood me for three weeks. In fact, he's still up there.

But Michael, the archangel, he came here to—he's working on him now. I got through to bring you the message. When I'm done talking to you, I'm going to go help Michael.

This battle's going on up there. And that's what Daniel 10 tells us, that there's this heavenly battle between the angels and demonic powers, which stands between God's issuing an answer to prayer and its actually arriving, which might explain why some things you've been praying for for a long time haven't happened yet. This battle's going on.

Now, having given us that information, the information that he came to bring is given in chapters 11 and 12. In chapter 11, he begins by saying there's going to be three or four more Persian rulers. And then there's going to be, as it turns out, the Greek Empire.

And then the Greek Empire is going to be divided into four, which it was after Alexander the Great died prematurely in his early 30s. His four generals divided up his empire, and they became four different kingdoms. And then it talks about, particularly, some of the intrigues and the battles between the king of the north and the king of the south.

Now, if you read chapter 11, it's going to be meaningless to you unless you know something about the intertestamental period in history. Alexander's kingdom, when he died, was divided up between four of his generals. One of them, named Ptolemy, controlled Egypt, which had been part of Alexander's conquest.

Another, named Seleucus, controlled Syria, up to the north of Israel, which had also been part of Alexander's conquest. There was also one named Telemachus, and I forget the other guy's name escapes me. He's not important in the Bible.

But Seleucus and Ptolemy are important in the Bible. And one of them ruled in Egypt, and one ruled in Syria, and Israel was right between them. And the wars between these two kings always involved Israel, not because Israel was involved in the war, but because Israel was just in the way.

They always had to pass through Israel to get there, and they didn't usually just pass through quietly. They raped and pillaged and killed Jews every time they went through. Why not? The Jews were just vulnerable.

And so these conflicts between the king of the south and king of the north are kind of traced for us in Daniel chapter 11, up to a point. And the king of the north, as you go through Daniel 11, the king of the north at the beginning is like Seleucus I. But as you go further on through, the king of the north is a later Seleucid king. And the king of the south at first is Ptolemy, but as you go through the chapter, the king of the south is a different Ptolemy.

Ptolemy II, Ptolemy III, Ptolemy IV, and so forth. So you're going through many generations of these Egyptian and Syrian kings and their intrigues. And finally, you get to

a Seleucid king in the north named Antiochus Epiphanes, also known as Antiochus IV.

You may have heard of Antiochus Epiphanes. He's the great persecutor of the Jews. He tried to eliminate the Jewish faith in Israel.

He tried to totally secularize or paganize the Jews. He met with resistance, and that resistance took the form of a guerrilla band called the Maccabees and the Maccabean Revolt, which led to a war between these forest-dwelling Robin Hood types. And the militarized Syrians eventually ended up with the Robin Hood types winning and driving the Syrians out of the country.

And they liberated the country, and Hanukkah celebrates that every year. Still, the Jews celebrate that liberation. And then for about 100 years, the Jews were self-governing.

The descendants of the Maccabees were called the Hasmoneans. They ruled their own nation for about 100 years until the Romans came and conquered. And then, of course, the Romans ruled until beyond the end of Israel because Israel was destroyed at the Roman hands in AD 70, and the Roman Empire went on for a few more centuries.

Now, that's the history. Chapter 11 of Daniel goes through basically from the death of Alexander the Great, the division of his empire, and the conflicts between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids up to Antiochus Epiphanes. And that brings us up through verse 35.

But then verse 36 to 40, or actually to the end of the chapter, is mysterious. The last several verses of Daniel 11, verses 36 through the end, are about a king. He's not said to be the king of the north or the king of the south.

We've been reading about the king of the north and king of the south throughout the whole chapter. But now in verse 40, the king of the north and the king of the south both come against this king. He's not from the north or the south, maybe from the east or west.

It's not really clear who he is. However, he finally comes to his end, and that brings us to chapter 12. And in chapter 12, it begins in the period of that difficult to identify king.

And it says, at that time, this is Daniel 12.1, at that time, Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation. Even to that time, and at that time, your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever. Now, chapter 12 in these opening verses sounds like it's talking about the end of the world.

For one thing, it says, many who sleep in the dust shall arise, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. That sounds like the resurrection when Jesus comes back. Just before that, it talks about a time of trouble that's like none before and like none after, which sounds very much like what Jesus said in Matthew 24.21. Then shall be a time of tribulation such as never was since the world began, nor shall ever be afterward.

And therefore, the most popular way to understand chapter 12 is that it is about the end times, the tribulation and the resurrection of the dead and Jesus' second coming. And that seems very reasonable. Now, the interesting thing about that is if we are in fact talking about the second coming and the end times, it begins in chapter 12, verse 1, saying at that time.

At what time? Well, the time that's been discussed in chapter 11. That king that's so hard to identify. And therefore, it's a very popular view to hold.

It is not my view, but almost everywhere you go, you'll hear people espousing this view, that that difficult to identify king in the end of Daniel, chapter 11, verses 36 to the end of the chapter, who's sometimes called the willful king or the vile person or whatever. But it's popularly said that that's the Antichrist, that that's the future Antichrist, that near the end of the world we will see the rise of this king that is described in verse 36 and following it, chapter 11. And then at that time, there will be this great time of tribulation, and then there will be the resurrection of the dead, as Daniel 12, verses 1 through 4 seem to say.

Now, that's an almost unanimous view of the people I've sat under and been taught by. I have reached a different view, and I'm not alone in that. I mean, I reached it on my own, but fortunately, whenever I reach a new view that's different than what I was taught, I'm always happy to find out that a whole lot of people more important than me already had figured that out, and I was like Johnny completely.

The problem with having this willful king at the end of Daniel 11 be a future Antichrist is we have an unmentioned gap from the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, which is 164 BC, to the future Antichrist, who has not yet shown up yet. So between verse 35 and 36, without a clue being given to the reader, we've got, you know, 2200 years gap. And so we've jumped from Antiochus to the Antichrist.

Now, the justification for this is said to be that Antiochus Epiphanes was a type and a shadow of the Antichrist. So after time got him, it jumps to the real thing at the end of the world. And that is not an altogether foolish way of thinking about it.

However, since the chapter 11 has been going from Alexander the Great to the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, all the way up to Antiochus Epiphanes, and then there's a king mentioned next. We might assume that this king that's at the end of Daniel 11 is

the next oppressor that came up after the Seleucids, after Antiochus Epiphanes. And the next oppressor of the Jews was Rome.

There are some very respectable scholars who think that this willful king at the end of Daniel 11 is Herod or the Herod family, who is a Roman official who ruled in Israel. And the family was destroyed around the same time the city was. In any case, if that is such, then when Daniel 12, 1 says, at that time, Michael will stand up and there'll be this time of tribulation or whatever, trouble.

That would be more likely referring to the Jewish war from 66 to 70 AD, which ended the life of the Jewish nation and the Jewish religion. The temple was destroyed. The priesthood was abolished.

Jews were scattered throughout the world. That was very significant to the Jews. That was the end of the world, in a sense.

I mean, it was horrible. And they are still living under the repercussions of that. Sure, there's some people, some Jews have gone back to Israel.

Most of them still live in Europe and America and places like that. But most of the Jews have ever since the Babylonian exile been outside Israel, in the diaspora, as they call it. Now, therefore, it is my, I actually feel that Daniel 12 is talking about that.

And I'll tell you why. If you look at chapter 12, and then we're going to go back to earlier things. If you look at Daniel 12, the latter part of it, after the prophesying ends, Daniel's curious and he's looking for answers.

And Daniel said in verse 8, he's speaking to one of the angels, he says, Although I heard I did not understand, then I said, My Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Now, it doesn't say the end of time. It says the time of the end.

The end of what? The end of the world, the end of the Jewish race, the end of what? The Jewish nation. What is the end of? It doesn't say. But it says they're sealed up until the time of the end.

And then it says, Many shall be purified, made white, refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. Now, what I want you to see here is that Daniel is asking for more information and he's told not for you to know what you prophesy is sealed up.

It's not going to be relevant right away. In the time of the end, knowledge will increase. The wicked shall be wicked, but the righteous will understand.

And and many will be purified through the fire and so forth. Well, this is language you

find in the New Testament and particularly in First Peter. If you look with me at First Peter, I believe that he gives us enough information to let us know what he believed about Daniel 12.

And since the wise will understand and Peter was one of the wise, I think he understood correctly. Remember in Luke 24, verse 44 or 45, it says that Jesus opened the disciples understanding that they might understand the scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures. So the disciples had a correct understanding of these Old Testament scriptures, even though we aren't always on the same page as them.

Look what First Peter's chapter one says of this salvation. He's not about hours as Christians. The prophets have inquired and searched carefully who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, what or what manner of time the spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow to them.

It was revealed that not to themselves, but to us. They were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. Things which angels desire to look into.

Now, Peter says that the prophets in the Old Testament, they inquired from they wanted more insight into what they're talking. They didn't know exactly or understand what they're talking. So they inquired and they were told it's not for them to know.

It's for us who have had the gospel preached to us. That is Christians to know it was not. It was too early for these things.

We understood in Daniel's time. He lived 600 years before the Christian church. But at the time of the end, that is at the time of the end of the Jewish system.

There would be a remnant called the disciples of Jesus who are Jews who were wise and he gave them understanding of the scriptures and it was for them to know those who preach the gospel to you. Peter says now. Peter speaks of the prophets plural having this curiosity.

I mean, given this kind of a rebuff from the angel. It's not for you to know. We don't know of any other prophet in the Old Testament that did that.

The only case we know of is Daniel chapter 12. There's no Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, none of them. None of the other prophets ever asked God something like that and got that kind of answer.

But Daniel got that very answer that Peter says. So he must at least have Daniel in mind. He may be assuming that if Daniel did it, other prophets did too.

But we know of Daniel doing it. Now, the interesting thing is he said that the prophets who did ask this question had been prophesying about Christ and about the glory of his resurrection and our salvation. They were promising about the new covenant in Christ and our salvation.

And he's thinking of Daniel chapter 12. He's got to be. If not, what other prophecies are you thinking of? He's got to be thinking of Daniel chapter 12.

And he's saying these prophets spoke about our times, Peter's times, first century Christian times. And therefore, I believe that Peter is saying that he understood Daniel to be prophesying about the times that Peter himself was living in. In fact, if you look what Peter actually said in one of his sermons in Acts chapter 3, interestingly, in Acts chapter 3, at the end of one of his sermons, he says, verse 24.

Actually, 24. Peter says to the Jews, yes, and all the prophets from Samuel and those who follow as many as have spoken also foretold these days. So he believed all the prophets as many as had spoken.

We're talking about his days. They were talking about the new covenant. They were talking about Jesus and the church.

They talk about the resurrection and enthronement of Christ in the kingdom of God established at that time. These days, Peter's days. Now, it's also interesting that at first Peter 1 7. Peter seems to speak to the church of his own time and ours, but his too, about.

He uses language from Daniel chapter 12, actually, and applies it to his own listeners because he says in first Peter chapter one and verse. Six and seven. In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you are grieved by various trials that the genuineness of your faith being much more precious than a gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found in a praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, he says that our trials are purifying us like gold is purified through fire. I don't know if you remember that line in Daniel 12. It would appear that Peter has Daniel 12 in mind again here in the same chapter where we found him talking about Daniel 12, a little a few verses later.

But we saw in Daniel 12 says many should be purified. Right? Verse three. I don't know.

I see. Yeah. Many should be purified.

That's right. And made white and refined. Now, Peter said that's what's happening to his listeners, his readers.

They're being purified through the trials. I think that when he's writing his first chapter of his first epistle, Peter is reflecting on Daniel 12, because that's where he talks about the prophets asking for more information being told is not for them to know that same chapter of Peter. So it strikes me from this that Daniel is talking about the coming of the new covenant and the destruction of the old covenant system, which, by the way, is something all the prophets did talk about.

At least almost all of them is a very major thing. Jesus, when he told his disciples that they would see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, which happened in 70 AD. He says he said to them in Luke 21, 20, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is near.

He said, then you who are in Judea flee, you know, and so forth. And he says, for these are the times of vengeance that all things that are written will be fulfilled. He's talking about Jerusalem being destroyed.

70 days. These are the days of vengeance that all things written where in the Old Testament will be fulfilled. Jesus said, and Peter seemed to agree, he ought to supposed to follow Jesus.

That the prophets all were talking about events that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the and the creation of the new covenant order. And so I believe the Daniel's prophecies go up that far. I don't know of any of that necessarily go further.

There might be one. There might be one prophecy that looks a little further than that. And we'll talk about that.

So that's what we've got our 12 chapters of the first six chapters are narrative. Historical narrative. The last six, the other half are visions and dreams that are prophetic.

Now, there's another way the book is divide that you would never know reading it in English. And that is that half of the book is in Aramaic and half is in Hebrew. Ezra is like that to Ezra has some of its chapters are Aramaic.

I don't know why these books were not all written in the same language straight through. But all the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, except for a few chapters in Ezra and a few chapters in Daniel. Daniel has six of each six Hebrew chapters and six Aramaic ones, but they're not the same as the division we just made.

It's not like the historical ones are in Aramaic and the prophecies are in Hebrew or something like that. It's actually chapters two through seven that are in Aramaic. Chapter one is in Hebrew and chapters eight through 12 are in Hebrew.

There's just a segment in inside there versus chapters 12 through seven. They're in Aramaic. Why? I don't know except to say this that.

It would appear that the chapters written in Hebrew are particularly of concern to the Jews. And Hebrew is their language. The chapters two through seven are these different prophecies and stories about judgment on pagans.

Now Aramaic was the more general language of the Middle East. It's a language very closely related to Hebrew. There's quite a few Semitic languages that are very similar to each other.

Hebrew is one of them. Aramaic is another. And over time, the Hebrew language began to pick up Aramaisms, that is certain words and phrases, just like we pick up.

We've got some German words and some Latin words and some Greek words in our English language. We call them loan words. Every language has loan words from other languages.

And there are loan words from Aramaic in the Hebrew language. In fact, one of the excuses that critics make for saying the book couldn't have been written as early as Daniel's time is that there are so many loan words from the Aramaic in the Hebrew of Daniel. And they say that wouldn't have happened quite so early as Nebuchadnezzar's time.

That would have happened some centuries later. Well, they're wrong. And in fact, everything they brought up as a criticism of the dating of Daniel has been wrong.

They've proven to be wrong. Let me talk a little bit about the criticism. Actually, we've gone an hour, so I need to take a break.

And when we come back, I want to talk a little bit apologetically about how we know Daniel was written in the time of Daniel and not four centuries later, as the critics would like to say. And then we're going to talk about the meaning of some of these prophecies.